



# City of Seattle

Department of Planning & Development

D. M. Sugimura, Director



## EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE SOUTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3015157

Address: 4730 32nd Avenue S

Applicant: Chris Weber of BAR Architects, for The Wolff Company

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, July 09, 2013

Board Members Present: Sam Cameron (Chair)  
Bo Zhang (substitute)  
Janet Stephenson (substitute)

Board Members Absent: Tony Case  
Amoreena Miller  
Stephen Yamada- Heidner  
Benjamin Smith

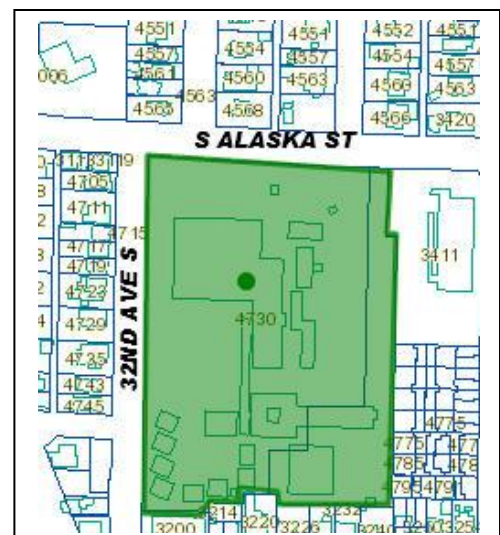
DPD Staff Present: Garry Papers, Senior Land Use Planner

### SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: Lowrise 3 - LR3  
Urban Village Overlay  
Edmunds Station Area District

Nearby Zones: North: SF 5000  
South: LR3  
East: LR3  
West: LR3

Lot Area: 271,860 sf (6.24 acres)  
Phase 1, subject project  
this report = 203,968 sf



Current Development:	The Zion Prep School occupies the entire site, with surface parking, about 4 large structures and several smaller ones scattered on the property.
Access:	The corner site has vehicle and pedestrian access from S Alaska Street to the north, and 32nd Avenue S to the west. There are no alleys adjacent.
Surrounding Development:	Predominantly single family houses line the two streets to the north and west, and a mix of houses, apartments and newer townhouses to the south and east.
ECAs:	Steep Slopes (ECA 1) on north and east edges of property
Neighborhood Character:	The site is mid-way between the Columbia City Light Rail station and the main street commercial heart of Columbia City. The immediate context is a mix of houses, apartments and newer structures, most about 20-30 ft height. There is a small plaza at the nearby corner of Edmunds and MLK, at the crosswalk access to the light rail station which is closest to the subject property.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes to demolish all existing structures and trees, and construct 5 or 6, four story residential structures, totaling approximately 254 units on the phase 1 southern portion. New site landscaping would include trees and amenity courtyards between the structures, and tuck-under and surface parking totaling about 185 cars along the east and south property edges.

<b>EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: July 9, 2013</b>
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## DESIGN PROPOSAL

The EDG Design Proposal booklet includes materials presented at the meeting, and is available online by entering the project number at this website:

[http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design\\_Review\\_Program/Project\\_Reviews/Reports/default.asp](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design_Review_Program/Project_Reviews/Reports/default.asp). or by contacting the Public Resource Center at DPD:

**Address: Public Resource Center**  
700 Fifth Ave., Suite 2000  
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

Email: [PRC@seattle.gov](mailto:PRC@seattle.gov)

## PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately 15 members of the public attended this Early Design Review meeting. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- Noted the perimeter parking creates a wide buffer to the neighbors and a safe, car-free internal zone for the project residents.
- Stated that an east-west pedestrian path through the large site would improve connectivity to the station and Rainier Avenue core, improve porosity and foster community (mentioned by several). Requested a building placement and site plan that allows for this to happen, whenever/whoever implements the specifics in the future.
- Objected to any visible surface parking, as the context has moved towards enclosed or underground parking on recent projects.
- Opposed to the large, long building walls shown as looming over adjacent houses and creating a tall monolithic backdrop visible behind the houses; supports smaller buildings.
- Encouraged more variety in the design expression of the different buildings, but supported the basically contemporary design language presented.
- Concerned that the parking spaces and drives along the east and south sides would impact the adjacent houses and back yards with headlights, noise, and trash dumpster noise/odors (mentioned by several). [The applicant responded saying all trash will be contained within buildings (not trash huts) and pick-ups will be carefully managed].
- Stated the proposal has a suburban feel with surface parking and internalized courts, not compatible with the existing context or desired street edge character.

## PRIORITIES & BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, and hearing public comment, the Design Review Board members (the Board) provided the following siting and design guidance. The Board identified the following **Citywide Design Guidelines** of **highest priority** for this project.

The guidelines are summarized below. For the full text of all guidelines please visit the [Design Review website](#).

### A. Site Planning

- A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics.** The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities such as non-rectangular lots, location on prominent intersections, unusual topography, significant vegetation and views or other natural features.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the basic site plan to use topography to conceal tuck-under parking on the south and east edges, but discussed**

at length how the buildings along 32<sup>nd</sup> need to transition with the slope and not create such tall stoops and blank walls at the south end, or in the preferred Option C, the approximate 8 ft of steps to climb into the main courtyard entrance, creating an ungracious welcome. The Board was also concerned with fair ADA access from the southwest as well as the proposed northwest level grade, and encouraged the design to provide equivalent ADA access and desire lines throughout the site. Except for this grade issue and other qualifications in this report, the Board generally supported Option C, although it did not place a great emphasis on aligning with Angeline Street.

The Board discussed the five Exceptional trees identified on the phase one site, and concluded they were in locations that do not contribute greatly to the site plan, but the Board does require full graphic and quantified analysis of development impact, any required departures if retained, and a complete replacement proposal at the next meeting. Also see DRB guidance under E-2.

- A-2 Streetscape Compatibility.** The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the lush setback landscape concept presented for along 32<sup>nd</sup>, and discussed how the 0-4 ft vertical stoops create desirable privacy layering, but taller than 4 ft is less-social, creates intimidating stairs and oversized blank walls. The design should introduce at least one vertical transition along 32<sup>nd</sup> to ensure no stoops are more than approximately 4 feet above the sidewalk. Ramps and/or lifts should be employed to resolve the transitions internally.

- A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street.** Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed it was very important to fully activate the one street frontage, and the stoops with visible entries and the 6 ft wide patios described, provide valuable activation and sociability.

- A-5 Respect for Adjacent Sites.** Buildings should respect adjacent properties by being located on their sites to minimize disruption of the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed the parking aisles and surface spaces are a wide buffer to the adjacent properties, but that site features and management practices should be included to mitigate the impacts of those functions. Specifically, headlights and vehicle noise should be physically buffered from the south and east property lines, using a mix of landscape, fencing and/or berms. The trash collection and pick-up locations should be consolidated and enclosed to contain noise

and odors, located far from any property lines, and the pick-up schedule/management should be regulated.

- A-6 Transition Between Residence and Street.** For residential projects, the space between the building and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed this sensitive transition is essential along 32<sup>nd</sup>, as noted under guidelines A-2 and A-3 above, and also important along all the ground floors throughout the plan, since the unit patios front onto the shared communal realm.**

- A-7 Residential Open Space.** Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed the 2 internal courtyards indicated require a clear program of uses, including a rich variety of active and passive spaces, such as family play/tot lots, rest gardens, and/or water features. Each internal space should have a use and landscape purpose, and become a distinct place, not simply 'filler turf'. The Board requests to see a specific open space program and detailed landscape design at the next meeting.**

- A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access.** Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties, and pedestrian safety.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the parking placement to create a wide buffer, but specific design features outlined under A-5 are needed to mitigate impacts to adjacent properties.**

- A-10 Corner Lots.** Building on corner lots should be oriented to the corner and public street fronts. Parking and automobile access should be located away from corners.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted the proposed Phase 1 is NOT a corner, but that parking and parking access are nonetheless both located distant from the corner of S Alaska and 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue S.**

<b>B. Height, Bulk and Scale</b>
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- B-1 Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility.** Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to near-by, less

intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk, and scale between anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the applicant-preferred Option C, with its broken building walls to the west and north, however the Board stated the following important qualifiers: the longer east and south building walls should have more substantial plan modulation than shown, and the upper stories (which will be visible behind and above the existing structures) should have stepbacks and/or a varying roofline or parapet, to break up the bulk and skyline profile.**

## **C. Architectural Elements and Materials**

- C-2 Architectural Concept and Consistency.** Building design elements, details and massing should create a well-proportioned and unified building form and exhibit an overall architectural concept. Buildings should exhibit form and features identifying the functions within the building. In general, the roofline or top of the structure should be clearly distinguished from its facade walls.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the basically contemporary architectural character presented for 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, but advised the other buildings exhibit distinct variations on that theme to avoid all repetitive buildings. Each building should be unified and consistent, but the 5 separate buildings should not display too much over-all consistency.**

- C-3 Human Scale.** The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements, and details to achieve a good human scale.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed the design should break down the scale of what are unusually long structures (even if all become 150ft) in a context of largely smaller lots and structures.**

- C-4 Exterior Finish Materials.** Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials that are attractive even when viewed up close. Materials that have texture, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed how material variety will contribute to both guidelines C-2 and C-3, and will be especially important to achieving a modulated skyline backdrop for all the upper floors, as described under B-1. Material quality and detailing is essential at all ground level locations, especially along 32<sup>nd</sup>.**

## **D. Pedestrian Environment**

- D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances.** Convenient and attractive access to the building's entry should be provided. To ensure comfort and security, paths and entry areas should be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from the weather. Opportunities for creating lively, pedestrian-oriented open space should be considered.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed how the primary pedestrian entries to the site should be inviting and not a tall chute of stairs. Seating and other landscape features should be integrated to make these entry gathering spots sociable.**

**The Board also discussed at length the concept of a semi-public path east-west across the site (not a public easement), as advocated by some community members. The Board did not see sizable benefit for pedestrians flowing to and from the light rail station and the Columbia City core, as existing Edmunds Street is the most direct route, and the light rail crosswalks are fixed.**

**The Board did agree modest benefit for general neighborhood pedestrian connectivity between 32<sup>nd</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> Avenues might accrue, if the project could allow for a potential path that connects with and through the site under development to the east (#3013340 – where a path is projected along its north property line). The Board encouraged the applicants meet with the adjacent site proponents and explore minimal (about 5 ft wide) path connection options for the future, even if a path alignment is not perfectly straight or involves stairs and/or portals through buildings. The Board requests the applicants bring these site plan options and their pro's and con's to the next meeting.**

- D-2 Blank Walls.** Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. Where blank walls are unavoidable they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed reducing the height of any blank walls along 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, and the careful design of all internal walls to minimize large blank conditions. To activate the lawns and internal places, patio fences should display a variety of materials, heights and transparency to promote security and socialability.**

- D-5 Visual Impacts of Parking Structures.** The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed most parking facades are screened from public view, but will be seen from adjacent properties, and thus deserve design integration. The surface parking at the northwest and southwest corners are**

visible from the adjacent street so well-detailed low fences should occur there. The southwest building corner should return approximately 10 ft to create an architecturally compatible building corner next to the adjacent carports.

- D-6 Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities, and Service Areas.** Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters, loading docks and mechanical equipment away from the street front where possible. When elements such as dumpsters, utility meters, mechanical units and service areas cannot be located away from the street front, they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the applicant stated locations of all trash and dumpsters to be internal to buildings and that no bins or dumpsters be located within the parking setback on the north, east or south sides. This includes the units in any buildings without elevators.**

- D-7 Personal Safety and Security.** Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.

**See comments under A-3, A-6 and D-2.**

## **E. Landscaping**

- E-1 Landscaping to Reinforce Design Continuity with Adjacent Sites.** Where possible, and where there is not another overriding concern, landscaping should reinforce the character of neighboring properties and abutting streetscape.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed how this large site affords an opportunity to establish a distinct landscape environment and deserves a planting and design concept that is inspired by the specific context, and is not ‘generic suburban garden apartment’. The Board encouraged plantings to emphasize native species, be organic/naturalistic, and be in-formal and clustered rather than aligned and regularly spaced. This is especially important along the east and south edges adjacent to neighboring properties, so for example, the generic one-tree every-five-parking spaces is NOT the recommended approach.**

- E-2 Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site.** Landscaping, including living plant material, special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, site furniture, and similar features should be appropriately incorporated into the design to enhance the project.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed the 2 internal courtyards should integrate a rich variety of walkway materials, site furnishings, and plant types and species, such as rest gardens, and/or water features. If on-site Exceptional trees**



are to be removed, the replacement trees should exceed the lost canopy area, be large species at installation, be similar species to evoke those lost, and be placed in visible, internal locations as feature trees or groves.

## **DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES**

The Board's recommendation on the requested departure(s) will be based upon the departure's potential to help the project better meet these design guideline priorities and achieve a better overall design than could be achieved without the departure(s). The Board's recommendation will be reserved until the final Board meeting.

**At the time of the Early Design Guidance meeting, the following departures were requested for the preferred Option C:**

- 1. Maximum Structure Width in LR zones (23.45.527):** The Code requires the maximum width of apartments in an LR3 zone that is also inside an Urban Village, to be 150ft, for all structures parallel to the front lot line. The applicant proposes Building #5 along 32nd Avenue to be 218 ft wide, an increase of 68 ft or + 45%.

**The Board indicated moderate receptivity to this departure, as it shifted the primary site pedestrian entry south and closer to the walking desire line to Edmunds Street S and the light rail crosswalk. However, the overriding consideration will be the lowering of the building ground floors along 32nd Avenue to about 4 ft maximum above grade (see A-1 comments above). A hybrid of Option B and C may be possible, which maintains 2 pedestrian connections to the future phase 2, but potentially eliminates or modifies both departures.**

- 2. Maximum Structure Width in LR zones (23.45.527):** The Code requires the maximum width of apartments in an LR3 zone that is also inside an Urban Village, to be 150ft, for all structures parallel to the front lot line. The applicant proposes Building #1 at the east, inboard side of the site to be 318ft wide, an increase of 168 ft or +112%.

**The Board indicated receptivity to this departure for this deeply recessed back-of-lot building, but conditioned that on the building design and profile responding very well to comments under B-1 above, or additional breaks or portals in the building wall, such as for pedestrian access mentioned under D-1.**

## **BOARD DIRECTION**

**At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board commented there are a range of key issues to get right, itemized in this report, and recommended the project should move forwards to MUP Application in response to the guidance provided at this meeting.**